The calls for the censorship of content and technologies is in the anglosphereic news again. Spurred by the tragic suicide of Molly Russell, the online safety bill's enables the censoring of 'legal but harmful' content. Along with this Labour has called to restrict the use of VPNs to prevent the circumnavigation of age restriction mechanisms. The death of Molly Russell has been put through the same moral panic process that has been repeatedly deployed over the past century. Like the satanic panic and the contemporary queer groomer scare. This process will inevitably create more victims. She has become a symbol of the wrong kind of person becoming a victim to the machinations of post-digital life. There is never a call to action when woman of colour receive online threats, forcing her to mothball her charitable work; or when transpeople and queer folx are bullied to suicide on twitter; or when Palestinian teenagers are surveiled through facebook. The tragedy of Molly Russell's death has become an avatar for the preservation of a particular kind of innocence in the face of the mounting contradictions of being online.

Contemporary online life has been dominated by transnational corporations who historically argued that the pursuit of connecting people was an unalloyed good. As the evidence mounted they doubled down. As buzzfeed reported in 2018, the VP of facebook (now Meta) Andrew Bosworth wrote in a memo, "We connect more people. That can be bad if they make it negative. Maybe it costs someone a life by exposing someone to bullies. Maybe someone dies in a terrorist attack coordinated on our tools."
For these companies connecting people means bringing them into their ecosystem, so they are able to extract data from them. To keep us there they use our emotional attachment to others and the delivery of unending content. They have built algorithms that present personalised content that will get us to react immediately. Often abreacting, because it is a quicker response and more engaging. This is now the well trodden description of the dangers of social media companies.

What is never discussed is where the content comes from. We all make it. Yes the social media companies facilitate the content delivery and incentivise the creation of "provocative" content, but we, the public, make it.
We make the misogynist influencers that encourage of the degradation of women.
We make the trolls who go on decades long campaigns to manipulate the mentally disabled for their amusement.
We make queer exterminationist wishing for the death of those who just want to be loved.
We make countless abusive parenting techniques that are used to torture untold numbers of children.
We make the grifters, the fascists, the terrorist, and the genocidal alike.
We make them all.

It is easy to blame technology for all of the above, as we have its fingerprints on three decades of atrocities now, but none of this content appears from the ether. The call for censorship is a call to save us from self reflection. We don't want to confront how we contribute to the evils of the world. Never having to have the communal conversation about what ideas we give permission to circulate amongst us. Not having to feel the guilt of not noticing our kin being consumed by hatred, because we are so overworked and alienated. We do not wish to grapple with the unease of not remembering how to communally bring people back from the brink. How to be a friend to the less powerful. Having to confront our own lack of warmth that allows to make such content… How we have led by example. How we deny our vulnerability to trickery. How denigrate those we care about. Deny others autonomy. How we hate the other…

There will always be the tyrannical and tech illiterate who are willing to save us from ourselves. Who will build the walled garden, never speaking of what it will cost us down the line. The walls they wish to build always ending up maintaining the extractive practices of the powerful, and denying autonomy for the rest of us. The moral panic of hexes leading to the witch burnings that enclosed the commons. Now we have this new panicked call for the protection of children, which

will inevitably be used to deny us nourishing connection and content. They would use censorship to deny our autonomy through violations of privacy. All the while steering us away from facing ourselves. Denying the collective conversation about what ideas are admissible. Delivered with the soothing lozenge of ‘I did it to protect the children.’

The censors and wall builders will always let the acceptable harmful content flow on the internet. Social media companies facilitate it because it is the most profitable content. Tyrants encourage it because it makes their base more powerful. And we permit it because we don’t have to feel discomfort. We allow ourselves to be led by people who have never sought our trust, and who seek our kinship through coercion. The censoring of content and technology is nothing short of an overzealous attempt at control. Control of what information we are allowed to see. Control of who we are allowed to connect with. Denying us the right to explore unobserved, and always finacialised. A deceleration that we can no longer be trusted to decide the appropriateness of an idea amongst ourselves. Locking us into a curated media landscape made for us by our “betters”. A slight of hand externalising the responsibility for the contradictions of a system they built. Making sure we never listen to the screamed warnings of emancipatory movements, from feminists to anti-fascists.

Censoring content and technologies is an effort to build a walled garden out of mechanisms of control and psychic violence, inflicted on the precarious and global south, in an effort to preserve ‘our’ innocence. We wish to reclaim the innocence to be able to explore and consume the world and the internet without ever being made aware of the consequences. An innocence built on the backs of denigrated unfortunates who spend minute after minute forced to stare unblinkingly at the dark core of the human condition. An innocence built on the backs the enslaved, the tortured, and the bombed. And let us be frank, this innocence we wish to restore is a white patriarchal normative innocence.
Mother’s had conversations with their daughters on which men to avoid before the internet.
People of colour feared the police before the internet.
Queer folx were subject to tides of abuse before the internet.
These groups never had access to pre-internet innocence we seek to reinstate. They have never been permitted any exploration that wasn’t overburdened with precarity. It is their bodies and minds that are always used as a mortar in the wall.

Technology doesn’t change a person, it facilitates and gives permission through content and structure. A vpn doesn’t turn a 14 year old into an 18 year old. The record book, the security camera, or the apple air tag doesn’t make the tyrant. Every day we are offered one thousand encouragements to create harmful content or intrude on another's autonomy. It is for us to choose if we do.

And yet it is never the technology that gives coercive power that has any powerful calls for banishment. The parent feels uneasy about the internet, because it is impossible to see what their innocent child is consuming. The government is uneasy about encryption because it is impossible to read what a citizen is writing. It is the same paternalistic logic that says that honest and frank conversation is beneath them. Orders should be obeyed.

We deserve humble leaders who can facilitate the difficult conversations on how we go forward now that the internet has let our dispossed emotions run amok across the surface of the world. A discussion on the incentives of digital content production, and the facilitation of coercive practices built into technology. Turning the tragedy of one teenagers suicide into a moral panic isn’t that. Protecting the extractive practices of corporations isn’t that. Excusing our inner tyrants for their own gain isn’t that. Atomising and cutting off the avenues by which we can have that conversation definitely isn’t that. We need solutions that value autonomy and privacy. That cherish kinship and

honest conversation. That are inclusive and lessens the precarity of exploration for all. That accepts where we are now, rather than a desperate scramble to an imagined past.

Censorship has never been that.